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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter _. NATIONAL ACCOUNTS AND BALANCES

Implementation of the System of National Accounts (SNA)

1. The Commission considered item 4 (b) of its agenda at its 454th and 455th meetings, on 23 and 24 February 1993. It had before it a report prepared by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) on implementation of the revised System of National Accounts (E/CN.3/1993/6).

2. The report outlined four areas where a coordinated international effort was critical: basic data development; handbooks, guidelines, manuals and special studies; training; and technical cooperation/assistance. ISWGNA identified a range of activities carrying forward a research agenda that would avoid lengthy delays in making major innovations in national accounts. ISWGNA also made suggestions about future work, for which resources had not yet been committed. With respect to publication of the revised SNA, ISWGNA was planning to publish the English version in 1993, with work to go forward on the other language versions as soon as the English manuscript including all changes, was available for translation - targetted at the end of June 1993. With respect to implementation, ISWGNA suggested a continuing role. It could possibly identify topics for research, seeking assistance for national

statistical offices in bearing the burden of preparing handbooks and compilation guides, and promoting the preparation of manuals in other fields that harmonize with SNA. It also suggested that it could serve as a coordinating body for, and could play a catalytic role with respect to, technical assistance/cooperation and training.

3. Constrained by the limited resources available at the current time, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat and the regional commissions, in close cooperation, outlined plans to assist countries in the implementation of the revised SNA by training trainers and the national accounts staff of national statistical offices, through seminars and country workshops, handbooks, the compilation of software and methodology and other training materials. In the first years, efforts were likely to be concentrated on the preparation of handbooks and training materials, identification of the basic statistics needed, and pilot implementation projects in a limited number of countries. The projects constituted a combination of efforts under way in a limited number of countries and drew on experience already acquired. It was envisaged that, provided new resources became available, a much more widespread programme of assistance to countries would develop, based in part on regional and subregional priorities expressed at regional forums.

4. The International Monetary Fund confirmed its active support for all four types of activities to support implementation of the revised SNA. In particular, the fifth edition of the Balance of Payments Manual and a companion volume, a compilation guide, would be published in early 1993. Work had started on a new manual on financial statistics; a complete draft was expected by the end of 1994. During 1993 work would start on revisions to the Manual on Government Finance Statistics, with a new draft expected about the end of 1995. The Fund expected to continue its extensive technical assistance programme in the areas of balance of payments and financial and government statistics, and would, on request, provide specific technical assistance in national accounts to members.

5. The World Bank welcomed the emphasis placed on rapid implementation of the newly adopted SNA. It would continue to play a role in ISWGNA and work in a coordinated manner with the other agencies, so as to avoid duplicating efforts. Owing to its intimate contact with national statistical agencies, the Bank was of the view that implementation of the revised SNA in many of the developing and transition countries would depend on rapid development of basic economic statistics. Therefore, concerted efforts to build statistical capacities were an essential first step. The Bank endorsed the need for handbooks and manuals but stressed that they should have a practical orientation. Research into outstanding and emerging issues under the auspices of ISWGNA would require the support of national offices. The Bank would continue to entertain and consider requests for technical assistance, through loans and credits, on a case-by-case basis.

6. OECD had already begun to collect material on the plans to implement the revised SNA in its member countries. The material would be presented at the

National Accounts Working Group, to be held in June 1993 in cooperation with ECE. As focal point for the implementation of the revised SNA in countries of the former Soviet Union, OECD had an extensive programme of technical assistance in national accounts for countries of Central and Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union which was already based on the revised SNA. Representatives of those countries would be invited to OECD meetings on national accounts and to special workshops and seminars.

7. EUROSTAT was working to develop a new version of the European System of Integrated Economic Accounts (ESA) which would be entirely consistent with the revised SNA and should be complete about mid-1994. Training in national accounts was provided to countries of the European Economic Area and Central and Eastern Europe under a special training programme. A similar programme was being developed for the countries of the former Soviet Union, in close cooperation with OECD. Special assistance would also be offered to countries in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions, under the terms of Lomé IV, and would involve training centres in both Europe and Africa.

8. Members of the Commission welcomed the suggestions made by ISWGNA regarding its future role. The Commission emphasized the urgent need for adequate handbooks and compilation guides. Those being prepared for countries in transition and dealing with conditions of high inflation were eagerly awaited. Several members mentioned plans to prepare national documentation which could be made generally available. Training and technical assistance were also stressed, and some members offered assistance in that area also.

9. Some members noted that, in general, plans and resources for assistance in the implementation of the revised SNA were already available for countries in the European region, although there was still a lack of clearly identified plans and resources for assistance for developing countries.

10. The Commission endorsed the intention to pursue research into the unresolved issues and to work on future aspects of the accounts - for example, environmental accounting and coverage of the informal sector. However, members cautioned that the research agenda should not be over-long or over-ambitious.

Action taken by the Commission

11. The Commission:

(a) Acknowledged that ISWGNA had proved a very effective mechanism for overseeing the revision process and developing the 1993 SNA, and expressed the wish that ISWGNA would continue to operate and would assume the responsibility for coordinating all aspects of the implementation programme. All the organizations concerned confirmed their continuing commitment to ISWGNA;

(b) Agreed that it would be desirable for the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, to be kept informed, through its Chairman, of actions scheduled by members of ISWGNA;

(c) Welcomed the offers of several member States and regional and international organizations to cooperate and assist in all aspects of the implementation of the revised SNA, as an important part of their work programmes;

(d) Agreed that the regional commissions of the United Nations should play a major role in the implementation of the new SNA in their respective regions and urged the Secretary-General of the United Nations to coordinate at a high level the mobilization of both bilateral and multilateral resources for that purpose.